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## They Say She Says it Hurts When She Breathes

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## *They Say She Says it Hurts When She Breathes*

In a beggar's pull, gram took a drag off life  
moist and ill  
with a fighting push, out it snored  
smelling of baked bread

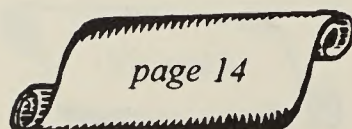
Does she have anyone besides you?  
No, they're dead.

We're it for us, I sighed to myself  
shifting in the footlights

I stoop to listen  
Is her hearing aid or her heart beeping  
Maybe it's just me  
hoping trace enzymes weren't  
a heart attack  
Pneumonia seems plenty at 82

Humming, venting, gurgling  
in a sing-song chorus  
Blue-white fluorescent  
staging for  
a falling star in an anonymous gown

Gnarled fingers that once changed my diaper  
now hold on for life to  
icy bed railings  
To pry them free would be to break them



Suited to snorkel  
laboratory tubules bent sloppily  
shoved up her snout  
but strong arms shout "Away!"  
Preventing her comfort  
for her own good and for ours

Fevered or sleeping deeply, I pondered  
Aghast at another dreadful  
labored cackle  
her poor heart must stop midway

Oh, wake up and play with me gram

Winded now,  
coughing in a cranking rhythm  
much like a cold engine block  
turning over and over  
sputtering stopping

Please don't die.

By: Janyce Hamilton

*"Perhaps someday it will be pleasant to remember even this."  
- Virgil, c. 20 B.C.*